

RIVARD REPORT

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Commentary: The Police Union Should Take the Deal

ROBERT RIVARD on 20 July, 2015 at 00:03



Ron DeLord is a larger than life figure in Texas law enforcement circles, whether he’s leading negotiations on behalf of a police union or riding his Harley to commemorate fallen officers. DeLord advertises himself as a “historian, author, and police union consultant” on his website [Gospel According to DeLord](#). Even that is an understatement.

What the description lacks is an understanding that DeLord also is something of a circus ringmaster, as anyone knows who has taken the time to read his collective bargaining bible, “[Police Union Power, Politics and Confrontation in the 21st Century](#),” or watching him in action. Staging disruptive conflict, launching intense personal attacks on key city officials and negotiating adversaries, targeting critics as anti-law enforcement, it’s all in there.

At least in Texas law enforcement circles, and probably beyond, DeLord is a celebrity.

I first wrote about DeLord’s book in April 2014 after the San Antonio Police Officers Association fired its first lead negotiator and hired DeLord. A recent perusal of the book is revealing: what has transpired in San Antonio over 17 months, nearly 20 bargaining sessions, and several staged walkouts reads like a carefully staged film script by author DeLord.


Yet another preplanned [suspension in talks](#) occurred last week when DeLord dismissed Mayor Ivy Taylor’s July 31 deadline for reaching agreement on a new contract, and instead announced stalemated talks would be suspended for the rest of the month while he embarks on another Harley ride.

Mayor Taylor, City Council and City Manager Sheryl Sculley see a new contract reached this month as the only sensible way to




Ron DeLord, attorney and lead negotiator for the San Antonio Police Officer Association.
Courtesy photo.

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move forward with the Fiscal Year 2016 General Fund Budget, which needs to be approved in August and takes effect Oct. 1. Such deadlines mean little to DeLord. The lure of the open road is stronger than the prospect of a closed deal.

Union president Mike Helle and his fellow officers sometimes seem like supporting cast on a stage dominated by DeLord. What they might not realize is that DeLord's playbook lacks a chapter on how to gracefully declare victory and get back to work. DeLord's strong suit is setting fires, then fanning the flames. To his credit, he's won the union a considerably better deal than the one offered by the City at the start of talks in April 2014. But there is little chance now of winning significant new concessions. DeLord's continued bluster and histrionics can only damage the union's already battered image in the community.



San Antonio Police Officers Association President Mike Helle (center) and Ron DeLord, the police union's lead negotiator (right) during the contract negotiations on Tuesday, March 31. Photo by Scott Ball.

That's why Helle could emerge as a hero by turning the tables and taking charge of the negotiations. Helle, who seldom speaks during the negotiations from his seat at the table next to DeLord, could thank the best union defender in the state for his excellent services and then let him to ride into the sunset.

The wage and benefits package the City of San Antonio has put on the table would win approval from most police unions in Texas. The average police officer is badly misled to believe even more money can be squeezed out of taxpayers and elected officials.

Helle, who barely won re-election earlier this year, could demonstrate newfound strength and leadership by taking matters into his own hands while DeLord is on the road. That opportunity is not without political risk, but there is good reason for Helle to go it alone without DeLord.

San Antonio would remain the only police union in the state and perhaps the country where members pay no monthly premiums for their rich health care plan. The free ride for dependents would end, but union members would enjoy four more years of premium-free coverage. The signing bonus and wage increases in the four-year contract are greater than most workers in the U.S. economy will enjoy over the same time period. The current offer on the table is fair to San Antonio's police officers and it's fair to taxpayers.

The San Antonio Police Department is arguably the best place in Texas to wear a uniform and work. It boasts the best overall compensation package in the state's most livable city. The union is doing itself no favors by prolonging matters. Voters strongly supported Mayor Ivy Taylor and City Council in the May and June elections, and those elected officials strongly support City Manager Sculley and her team.



Unless Helle rethinks the union's posturing this week, Mayor Taylor's July 31 deadline will come and go without a deal. DeLord will be happy on his Harley while Helle will be left flat-footed outside City Hall, without a signing bonus and without a scheduled pay raise later in the year for his members. A stronger union president would recognize a good deal and take it, and then turn his attention to selling it. He also would stop fighting City Hall just for fighting's sake.

RIVARD REPORT

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Police union President Mike Helle (center) talks to reporters while lead negotiator Ron DeLord records the conversation on his phone (right). Photo by Hagen Meyer.

Helle can make everything change in a day by taking charge and making a deal. He would win back public support for the police union in an instant. All he has to do is negotiate a few face-saving changes to the current deal on the table and then announce an agreement alongside Mayor Taylor, the City Council and City Manager Sculley.

Helle could thank DeLord publicly for all he accomplished on his visits here, even buy him a new Harley. There would still be time for union members to cash bonus checks and enjoy their own summer vacations. City Council's new budget would include a future pay raise for the police.

All would applaud as the curtain then falls on the city's longest and most distracting melodrama.

**Featured/top image: Jeff Londa (left), who leads the City's team, speaks with attorney Ron DeLord, the police union team's lead negotiator. Photo by Scott Ball.*